



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE
DURING PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Asked by: Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Education and Youth Affairs

Redirected to: NA

Reference: Uncorrected Hansard Transcript pages 96 - 97

In relation to: Occupational Violence Policy Review

Hearing Date: 1 August 2024

QTON lodgement date: 2 August 2024

Answer Due Date: 7 August 2024

THE CHAIR: So we—I said, where is the review up to? I guess what I am looking for, is the review completed? If not, what is the expected completion date, and will it be publicly available once it is complete?

Ms Haire: So, Ms Lawder, we are in phase two of review of the Occupational Violence Policy. And I will hand to Ms Atkins, to take you through the phases and the expected completion date, noting that we are doing this in collaboration with our workforce and that that is part of the important element of it. Ms Atkins.

Ms Atkins: Jessie Atkins, Executive Branch Manager, Complex Behaviour Support and Work, Health and Safety, and I have read and understood the privileges statement.

The occupational violence review has come out of the rapid review recommendations which were currently still in the process of implementing. Phase one of the review is complete and involved a listening report and a literature review. It was important for us to be able to hear the experiences of the people on the ground who have to implement the policies and processes, use our tools and resources on a daily basis. So we have used that information to join up and enter into phase two of the review.

We have completed an initial part of that phase two which has included three workshops with other relevant areas of the directorate, including our people capability branch and also included representatives from the AEU and the CPSU where we have been able to take a more detailed look

at existing policies, our procedures, our management plan. The view is that that piece of work will be completed by the end of 2024 for implementation during 2025.

THE CHAIR: Will the review be release publicly; what about phase one if it has been completed, is that available?

Ms Atkins: I might have to take that on notice, I am not sure if it is available at this point, Ms Lawder, apologies.

MISS NUTTALL: Just going back to Ms Lawder's initial question in that, will phase two, once it is completed, be made public?

Ms Atkins: The outcome of phase two will be a new policy and procedures, and that will be made public on the Education Directorate website. It will also—there will be a range of training and other communications materials around that. So that is the sort of practical aspect of the outcome of the review would be—

MISS NUTTALL: So based on that then, phase two is the final?

Ms Atkins: Yes, that is right.

THE CHAIR: Can I check, phase one is completed; you are not sure if it is publicly available but you said it was a listening report and a literature review? Why would it not be—

Ms Berry: We will see if we can get some advice and see if we can get it out.

THE CHAIR: You will take that on notice?

Ms Berry: Yes. I will just say, it is Andy Mison who is the Australian Secondary School Principals Association President. He was formally a Hawke College and Harrison Primary School principal in the ACT, so we are well-represented nationally.

Minister Yvette Berry: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

Phase 1 of the Occupational Violence Review consisted of a literature review and listening report. These documents are attached. These artefacts have been shared with relevant stakeholders and are one aspect being considered to inform the Directorate's policy position and the co-designed activities currently underway in Phase 2.

Once Phase 2 is completed and the updated policy is finalised, any relevant documents will be made publicly available.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature:



Date:

7/08/24

By the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Yvette Berry MLA

bluebird

**Prevention and
Intervention Strategies
for Occupational
Violence in schools - A
scoping literature review**

ACT Education Directorate

2024



Contents

1. Abstract	4
2. Introduction	5
3. Understanding occupational violence in the Research landscape.....	5
4. Key findings and emerging themes.....	8
5. Links to other relevant research related to the prevention of occupational violence.....	13
6. Conclusions	19
Appendix A Literature review methodology	20
A. Scopus search procedure	20
Research database	20
Search criteria	20
Search results.....	21
B. Non-Scopus supplementary journal search	21
C. International research and best-practice guidance reports.....	22
D. Grey literature.....	23
Appendix B References	24
APPENDIX C: Challenges and strategies related to OV management in the healthcare sector compared to education settings.....	30

Abstract

This literature review has been conducted to aid the development of a systemised risk management framework to prevent and reduce Occupational Violence (OV) in ACT public schools in the context of Work Health and Safety practice. This paper addresses the following research question: **What are the effective prevention and early intervention strategies that can reduce the occurrence of occupational violence in school settings?**

A scoping review was conducted using the online database Scopus, supplementary journal searches, international evidence-based research synthesis of best practice guidance reports and policy and grey literature. The literature review shines a light on the critical concerns and the complex nature of the issues involved when attempting to establish safe environments within educational settings. Five themes have emerged:

1. The link between violence in schools and work health and safety is well known, however, surprisingly under researched, given the increasing occurrence and significant impacts on the teaching profession (Theme 1).
2. The research identifies a need for positive and inclusive school climates with strong community engagement to prevent and respond to OV (Theme 2).
3. Schools directed by school leaders who plan and prepare for OV by ensuring staff are skilled and capable of proactively preventing and managing OV have lower levels of violence (Theme 3).
4. Evidence-based initiatives and positive behaviour programs informed by robust data are important and act as protective measures against OV in schools (Theme 4).
5. Student-centred safety frameworks and tailored interventions for students with complex needs are important to prevent and respond to OV (Theme 5).

Key words: school, violence, behaviour, prevention, safety, teacher

Introduction

Like educational institutions worldwide, Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Public Schools face multifaceted challenges in ensuring school safety. In a 2022 survey of government primary school staff in the ACT almost two-thirds of respondents reported abusive language, and two-fifths respectively reported physical aggression, and experiences of other threatening behaviour from students (Stevenson et al., 2022 p. 154).

With reports of increasing rates of school-based occupational violence (OV) and serious incidents involving student behaviours, it is timely for the ACT Education Directorate to seek a greater understanding of the complex nature of the issues involved in maintaining safe working and learning environments. To address the challenges of OV in schools, an understanding of the context, causes and consequences is essential in ensuring effective prevention and early intervention strategies (Lippel, 2016).

This literature review aims to directly uncover the evidence base supporting successful ways to reduce and prevent OV in schools. It was conducted in 2023-24 to guide the ACT Education Directorate's Review into the Prevention and Management of Occupational Violence in ACT public schools.

It will be used to inform the development of the following review deliverables:

- Desktop Review and Gap Analysis Report
- Occupational Violence Risk Management Framework
- Implementation Roadmap

The research comprised of a scoping review of English language publications in areas of education, psychology, social science, and education-related health sub-disciplines studies published last decade (2013 and beyond) and author affiliation of Australia, United Kingdom, United States, Germany, or New Zealand. It uncovered evidence base of ways to successfully to reduce OV in schools in many other related disciplines including psychology and behaviour science.

Understanding occupational violence in the research landscape

Over the last three decades, work health and safety in the workplace has continued to emerge as a field of concern. In response, Australian federal and state/territory legislation has been modernised to reflect the increasingly sophisticated understanding and acceptance of the responsibilities of employers to ensure worker safety.

The Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws in Australia are designed to ensure the health and safety of workers and others in the workplace. A significant risk in workplaces, including those in the education sector, is the occurrence of violence and aggression and its impact on the health and safety of employees.

Defining occupational violence in the context of schools

Within the context of the ACT Education Directorate, OV is defined in the Directorate's *Managing Occupational Violence Policy* as:

'any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work.'

This definition of OV is supported in the literature (Stevenson *et al.* 2022).

To address the challenges of OV in schools, an understanding of the context, causes and consequences is essential in ensuring effective prevention and early intervention strategies (Lippel, 2016). Lippel's research provides an overview of policy considerations and frameworks focused on OV. It concludes that much of the research is discipline specific (including education) but also synthesises the research into broader frameworks.

Lippel (2016) explains that **OV can be understood as a matrix of types of behaviour and the source of behaviour which can then be responded to within a classic WHS model, which includes prevention and risk mitigation.** The literature also provides a useful framework for positioning the prevention and response strategies within three broad categories:

1. Environmental (design, facilities, and lighting)
2. Organisational and administrative (policy and staffing) and
3. Behavioural (training and capability).

Increasing rates of occupational violence in schools

Australian and international literature concur that school-based OV is increasing (Stevenson *et al.* 2022; Lowe *et al.* 2019; Armstrong, 2018; Riley, 2019). Rising rates of suspension and exclusion/expulsion in response to serious incidents involving student behaviour also support this conclusion (DRC, 2023, Armstrong, 2018). Tiesman *et al.* (2012 p. 65)¹ conducted a questionnaire-based study of 6,450 education workers (teachers and school-based support professionals) in the United States on the issue of OV. This study found that an estimated 7.8% of education workers were physically assaulted and 28.9% experienced a non-physical workplace violence event during the 2009–2010 school year. Nationally comparable statistics are not available in Australia (AITSL, 2020) but Australian-based research suggests

¹ This report was electronically published November 2012 but was physically published in 2013.

equivalent or higher rates of OV in schools. Stevenson *et al.* (2022 p.154) surveyed 369 government primary school staff in the Australian Capital Territory and reported that 60% of respondents reported abusive language, 42% physical aggression, and 43% experienced other threatening behaviour from students at least weekly.

An exploratory, survey-based study conducted in Australia by Billet *et al.* (2019 p.18) of teacher-targeted bullying and harassment by students and parents, highlighted that 10% of participants reported being punched in the preceding year. In contrast, Billet *et al.* (2019 p. 19) noted that physical attacks by parents on teachers were rarer, with 8.8% reporting a parent standing over or invading their personal space and 1.1% experienced being hit or punched by a parent. A factor to bear in mind is that not all OV is directed at teachers (Lowe *et al.* 2020). Breaking up physical fights between students (Tiesman *et al.* 2012) and verbal aggression or threats of violence by parents (Billet *et al.* 2019) can also harm school staff, and affect the health, safety and/or wellbeing of the individual involved in the incident and fall within the definition of OV.

Rates of OV have risen after students physically returned to school in 2021 after the end of COVID-19 related school closures (McMahon *et al.* 2022). The US-based National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) highlights that more than 80% of U.S. public schools reported the pandemic had negatively impacted student behaviour and socio-emotional development with student misconduct and verbal aggression to teachers significantly increasing (NCES, 2022). A recent New South Wales (NSW)-based case study by Fray *et al.* (2022 p.1547) concerning student's return to school post lockdown, highlighted increased incidences of aggressive behaviour in the classroom directed at teachers.

Impacts of school-based occupational violence on staff and students

Research underpinning the negative impacts of OV is substantial and robust and details a range of issues that continue to affect school staff who experience OV. The research of McMahon *et al.* (2022b), Peist *et al.* (2023), and Espelage *et al.* (2013) detail **harms to teachers of a psychological perspective, including risk of burn-out (psychological exhaustion) and negative impacts on physical health over the long term** (Maslach, 1976). Moon and McCluskey (2018 p.134) researched teacher victimisation at schools as a subset of OV, and their results indicated that **'physical assault victimisation had strong negative effects on job performance, perceptions of school safety, and thoughts about leaving the job and profession'**.

Several international studies indicate that deliberately disruptive behaviours by students, such as making inappropriate noises, non-compliance with teacher requests, have a significant, cumulative negative impact on teacher psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction (Aldrup *et al.* 2018; Armstrong *et al.* 2015; Westling, 2010). It is important to recognise that disruptive behaviours and OV are not the same.

OV refers to incidents of violent behaviour against staff in circumstances related to their work;

disruptive behaviour encompasses a broader range of conduct that interferes with or has the potential to

interfere with the operation of the workplace or the ability of others to perform their duties. This includes behaviours that may not be violent or directly harmful but still create a negative or unproductive work environment.

Additionally, according to literature surveyed, disruptive behaviours are common in classrooms – much more common than incidents involving occupational violence (Armstrong, 2018). Importantly, research on this topic indicates that disruptive behaviours drive negative psychological outcomes for teachers, similarly to outcomes from OV, yet disruptive behaviours fall below the threshold of occupational violence in terms of severity (e.g., are typically non-aggressive). In support of this analysis, Aldrup *et al.* (2018 p. 126) state ‘An exhaustive number of studies investigating factors related to teacher well-being have found that teachers rate student misbehaviour as particularly stressful and consistently report poorer well-being when they perceive elevated levels of inattentiveness, classroom disturbances, or disciplinary problems.’

Incidents involving violence, threats or aggression are reviewed in Australian and international research and detail links to consequent outcomes of teachers leaving the profession. Armstrong (2018) discussed stress-related occupational impacts of OV and detailed the concerning, though poorly examined phenomena of ‘stress contagion’. This is where students experience elevated anxiety and emotional dysregulation in classrooms, resulting in the teacher being distressed and emotionally exhausted. The literature fails to detail the level of harm caused by OV in relation to teacher health and wellbeing, based on student behaviour.

Key findings and emerging themes

OV is a work health and safety matter, governed by legislative obligations. The review has highlighted that it is an emerging, yet understudied phenomenon. Educational institutions worldwide face multifaceted challenges in ensuring school safety, particularly concerning violence prevention. Diverse research approaches have shed light on the critical concerns and the complex nature of the issues involved in maintaining safe working and learning environments.

Theme 1: Occupational violence is a work, health and safety risk that remains unstudied in the educational context.

Workplace violence and aggression is when a person is abused, threatened, or assaulted at the workplace or while they’re working (Safe Work Australia, 2024). This can occur in person, over the phone or online and can be in the form of both physical and psychological harm, presenting a risk to the health and safety of people in the workplace. Persons conducting a business or undertaking PCBUs are legally bound to manage the health and safety risks of workplace violence and aggression between workers and from other people at the workplace, like customers and clients (Safe Work Australia 2024). Noting this national

and in many other cases international legislative obligation, there remains little evidence and research around preventing violence in schools and ensuring there are measures in place to protect employees exposed to violence in schools.

Several Australian and international studies informing this review highlighted that OV against school staff is an overlooked workplace issue in research, practice, and in educational policy (Lowe *et al.* 2020; Espelage *et al.*, 2013; Kapa *et al.* 2018).

An Australian-based paper by Stevenson *et al.* (2022), indicates a gap in evidence from a teacher perspective about effective educational practices, interventions or support necessary to reduce or prevent the occupational harm caused to teachers by violence in school.

Stevenson *et al.* (2022; p. 154) commented that there was a lack of 'research-based knowledge about what works on the ground in terms of preventing and dealing with potential harm caused by occupational violence' from the perspective of educators.

Grey literature from Safe Work Australia identifies the Code of Practice for managing psychosocial hazards in the workplace another literature that provides best practice guidance for PCBUs on preventing workplace violence and aggression in the workplace through risk mitigation strategies. This literature identifies education and training industries as being higher risk, however, fails to provide specific guidance related to the educational context and public service facing functions where the service is a human right and ongoing service provision must be maintained. Further guidance has been developed by WorkSafe ACT (2023) that addresses psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

In 2020 the Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership (AITSIL) released a national strategy to respond to and address the increasing rates of abuse towards school staff (AITSIL 2020). This strategy was developed to ensure the occupational health, safety, and wellbeing of the profession and identified the need to build a nationally consistent picture of prevalence and a common understanding of the scale of the problem. The Strategy outlines five key priority areas and five national actions: building evidence base by nationally consistent approach on the definition of OV and data; focus on wellbeing; strengthening school communities through prioritisation of positive school environment; raising the status of the teaching profession; and using innovation and adaptability in education to respond to growing complexity in this space.

The strategy also highlights that from a Work Health and Safety perspective, it is important to have clear and consistent policies, procedures and supports in place for when occupational violence occurs; including legal and regulatory frameworks such as the Work Health and Safety Act to act on serious threats to wellbeing (AISTL 2020).

Theme 2: Positive and inclusive school climates shaped by school leadership act as protective factors in reducing OV.

Changes to improve school climate emerged as an important protective factor in reducing the impact of OV, or even preventing it from occurring in the first place.

Addressing teacher-directed violence and turnover, Peist *et al.* (2023) highlighted pivotal factors influencing educators' decisions to leave the profession. Their findings emphasised the significance of school climate, safety concerns, community relationships, administrative support, and policy in shaping teachers' professional trajectories. This highlights the imperative of cultivating conducive school environments to mitigate violence and retain educators.

Peist *et al.* (2023), Eisman *et al.* (2020), and Kroeger (2019) highlighted the significance of understanding the nuanced challenges within educational environments, especially concerning teacher-directed violence, and recommended frameworks emphasising improvement in school climates.

Eisman *et al.* (2020) delved into comprehensive approaches to bolster mental health support while enhancing school security. In the context of Eisman's research, school security was treated as equivalent to school safety. Their intervention, centred on promoting a positive school climate, emphasised the criticality of implementation strategies alongside evidence-based interventions. This study underscored the importance of a multifaceted approach to addressing mental health needs within the school setting.

Voight and Nation (2016) emphasised cultivating positive school climates through inclusive policies, complementing the recommendations of Olivier *et al.* (2021) and Carden (2017) on engaging communities and fostering partnerships to bolster school safety. Duong and Bradshaw (2012), Kor *et al.* (2023), and Leuschner *et al.* (2017) advocated for initiative-taking measures, including early interventions and preventive strategies, aligning with the suggestions from Osher *et al.* (2014) to promote a positive school climate conducive to safety.

Kroeger's work (2019) emphasised the pivotal role of school-community partnerships in fostering inclusivity for LGBTQI youth and families. Recommendations highlighted the importance of age-appropriate strategies, multidisciplinary collaborations, and support mechanisms to create inclusive and safe educational environments.

Cullen *et al.* (2020), writing for the EEF, and McMahon *et al.* (2020b), briefing the US Department of Education, underscore the significance of prioritising students' mental health and creating safe, inclusive, and supportive school environments. These sources also advocate for evidence-based strategies and interventions.

Adequate personal and professional support from colleagues in the event of OV incidents was identified as part of this larger factor and connected to the overall school climate shaped by school leadership (Stevenson *et al.* 2020).

Other factors that support a positive school climate such as adequate teacher: student ratios (Peist *et al.* 2020); sufficient mental health staff and support services for at-risk students (McMahon *et al.* 2020b);

and visibly supportive and active school leadership (Peist *et al.* 2020) were identified as protective measures in reducing the prevalence of OV.

Theme 3: The provision of effective training for school staff can help to prevent and reduce violence.

Multiple sources of evidence conclude that school staff should be supported to access training which develops staff capability to understand the risks related to OV including the precursors to violence, crisis identification and a greater understanding of students with complex needs.

Allnock and Atkinson (2019), Reddy *et al.* (2018), and McMahon *et al.* (2017) highlighted the necessity of extensive training and support mechanisms for educators, empowering them to proactively prevent and address violence in schools.

The American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force's survey during the COVID-19 pandemic (McMahon *et al.*, 2022) revealed alarming levels of educator dissatisfaction, instances of violence from various sources, and pervasive safety concerns. Their survey underscored the urgent need for additional training, mental health support, and systemic reforms to address safety concerns among educators and students alike.

Leuschner *et al.* (2017) emphasised the critical need for initiative-taking intervention strategies to avert targeted school violence. Their research, focusing on the Networks Against School Shootings (NETWASS) program in German schools, underscored the program's success in enhancing teacher competencies, crisis identification, and fostering positive teacher-student interactions.

Lippel (2016) highlighted the need for clear policy frameworks to address OV related risks including appropriate training and development at all levels, particularly for managers. Recruitment of staff with social skills and capability to deal with conflict respectfully, are important preventative measures.

Caple (2017) conducted an independent review into occupational violence in ACT public schools and concluded that more training and support was needed for school staff who work with students with complex needs. It also concluded a key strategy for reduction of the occurrence of OV is the development of close working relationships between education departments and universities, with a view to ensure pre and early educators are being provided placements and support on how to teach and engage students with complex needs.

Theme 4: Evidence-based initiatives and strategies supported by robust data should inform the development of positive behaviour approaches.

The literature confirms that evidence-based research and strategies are necessary to underpin the development of effective policies to ensure workplace health and safety. Tiesman *et al.* (2013) underscored the pivotal role of robust data in informing effective interventions. This aligns with Gerberich

et al. (2014) and Moon and McCluskey (2020), advocating for evidence-based strategies derived from comprehensive data analysis.

The literature focuses on both preventing and addressing disruptive behaviour. The EEF guidance provides strategies for behaviour management and prevention, while the US Department of Education's principles underscore evidence-based approaches to address misbehaviour.

Several evidence-based programs and approaches were identified in the literature as effective in reducing OV. These include:

- Triple-P Parenting Program (evidence-based parent training) (Program). (Boyle *et al.* 2022).
- Caring School Community (Program). (CASEL,2023 ;Chang *et al.* 2006).
- Functional Behaviour Assessment (professional development delivered classroom approach). (Stevenson *et al.* 2020; Armstrong, 2021; Armstrong *et al.* 2015).
- Positive Behaviour Support and Interventions (PBIS – Program). (Armstrong,2020).
- Evidence-based empathy programs for at-risk students. (Cullen *et al.* 2020; McMahon *et al.* 2020b; Moore *et al.* 2019).
- Too Good for Violence. (Hall and Bacon, 2005).

Theme 5: Importance of student-centred safety frameworks and tailored interventions for students with complex needs.

Vincent *et al.* (2022) and McMahon (2022b) brought attention to student-centred safety frameworks, stressing the importance of student voices in school safety measures. Vincent *et al.*(2022) developed a field test of the Student Ownership, Accountability, and Responsibility for School Safety (SOARS) framework that concentrated on student-centred approaches to school safety. The findings emphasised the significance of student engagement, accountability, and reporting tools in improving school safety outcomes.

Studies by Bare *et al.* (2022), Hughs *et al.* (2017), Hudson Davis and Bourne (2016), and Adams and Mrug (2019) underscored the importance of tailored interventions, trauma-informed care, and mental health support, recognising the diverse needs of students and staff.

Personalised academic and behavioural support for students with complex needs emerged as a key finding of research in terms of reducing the incidence and severity of OV (Peist *et. Al.* 2023; Armstrong, 2020; Moore *et al.* 2019; Armstrong *et al.* 2015). This finding accords with wider clinical literature about individuals with developmental challenges and the risk of presenting with aggression or violent behaviour. Student with complex needs can in some cases incur greater risk of aggression for those working closely with them (Esteves *et al.* 2021: Oubrahim and Combalbert 2021).

The EEF's Special Educational Needs (SEN) guidance and the US Department of Education's principles stress the importance of evidence-based discipline approaches and personalised interventions tailored to individual students' needs. Both sources highlight the significance of the development of positive relationships in reducing disruptive or aggressive behaviour. The EEF guidance stresses understanding individual students, while the US Department of Education emphasises fostering belonging and supporting diverse student needs. Equity and fairness in discipline practices are key themes. The US Department of Education's principles emphasise fair discipline policies without exclusionary practices, aligning with the EEF SEN report's recommendation for ensuring equity among students.

Sources of literature converge on the overarching themes of prioritising students' mental health, safety, and inclusivity within school environments, tailored interventions, stakeholder involvement, evidence-based discipline, and strategies to prevent and address student behaviour while promoting equitable treatment for all students.

These diverse studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of school safety, advocating for the prioritisation of positive and inclusive school approaches, evidence informed strategies, and systemic changes. Student centred safety frameworks that cater for individualised approaches ensure safer and more conducive educational environments for all stakeholders.

Links to other relevant research related to the prevention of occupational violence

The literature review identified multiple OV research studies that revealed important evidence related to OV, that whilst not explicitly detailing early intervention and prevention measures, provides useful insights into strategies that can inform behaviour management and reduce harm to school staff.

Link 1: Investigating occupational violence against teachers

Literature investigating OV includes Stevenson *et al.* (2022); Moon and McClusky, 2018; Gerberich *et al.* 2013; Wei *et al.* (2013). Research studies in this category were not always directly related to what works to prevent OV beyond the context of the study presented. Wei *et al.* (2013) provided no recommendations for practice or policy.

Link 2: Harm reduction for teachers

Studies focussed explicitly on prevention or harm-reduction for teachers: McMahan *et al.* (2022a) (2022b); AITSL, (2020); Gallagher *et al.* (2019). The literature did not specify classroom-level practices, interventions, or support to address OV.

Link 3: Behaviour improvement, including reduction in aggressive or violent behaviour

Several sources focussed on improving behaviour across the whole school or school-systems, including, a reduction in OV (Moore *et al.*, 2019; Armstrong *et al.* 2015). Literature in this category could inform beneficial system-wide change but is not directly framed in terms of reducing OV.

Link 4: Reducing occupational violence perpetrated by students in 'at risk' categories

Preventing violence or aggression arising from students with complex needs or at risk of mental health conditions was the focus on of several other sources (DRC, 2023; Armstrong, 2020; Malti *et al.* 2016; Hall and Bacon, 2005). Whilst these sources did not focus on harm reduction for teachers, this literature is nonetheless relevant as students with complex challenges are at elevated risk of presenting with aggressive or violent behaviour ([Table 1](#)).

Mental health professionals and researchers in school-based mental health, commonly use a framework encompassing risk and protective factors to determine how 'at-risk' a child is of becoming unwell (Patel *et al.* 2008). Emerging research has begun to apply the framework to teacher psychological wellbeing and has investigated factors such as 'teacher caring' and whether this could be a factor that protects teachers' psychological health in the long term (1 year +) as well as reducing the frequency of aggressive behaviour by students (Gallagher *et al.* 2019). The study measured a variable they defined as 'teacher caring' using student's responses to six statements which were:

- 'Teachers in this school listen to what students have to say.'
- 'Teachers in this school want all students to feel respected.'
- 'Teachers in this school consider students' feelings.'
- 'Teachers in this school care about how we feel.'
- 'Teachers in this school want students to respect each other's ideas.'
- 'Teachers in this school treat students fairly.'

Using this defined variable, the study showed that teachers with a perceived 'higher level of caring' were protected from psychological damage. In the body of the text, 'teacher caring' is further elaborated on as showing the following traits:

- High level emotional support
- Mutual respect
- Positive interactions between student and teacher.

Link 5: Scale of implementation for effective school-based interventions

Considering the scale of implementation is helpful in determining effective responses and is a useful organising lens to consider evidence-based practices, interventions and the specific support required to address OV. The scale of implementation is also relevant to the impact felt by teachers. Scale of implementation is an established organising principle in the literature of implementation science and

useful in designing effective school-based interventions (Boyd *et al.* 2022). Scale is mentioned in the literature on the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools (Humphrey *et al.* 2020). School-based SEL programs have been used to improve the school behavioural climate and reduce aggressive behaviour of at-risk students, for example students with developmental disabilities (Humphrey *et al.* 2020; Armstrong *et al.* 2015).

Table 1: Scaled effective responses preventing or reducing the severity and/or frequency of occupational violence impacts on teachers.

Level	Recommended practice, intervention, program, or support (examples)	Source
System Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and state level investment and policy change. Workforce development to strengthen teacher capacity and capability in preventing behaviour leading to suspension or exclusion of students with a disability. • Investment in sufficiently resourced school-based mental health services for students and for teachers. • National policy actions, e.g., Establish a national picture of prevalence of occupational violence, Raising the status of the profession. • Adopt Triple-P Parenting Program (evidence-based parent training). 	<p>DRC (2023). McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2020a). AITSL (2020).</p> <p>Sanders (2023); Armstrong (2020) Cullen <i>et al.</i> (2020); and McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2020b) AITSL (2020)</p> <p>Boyle (2023)</p>
School level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt Positive Behavioural Interventions and supports (PBIS). • Early intervention strategies and preventative strategies at school and classroom level. • Teachers use culturally responsive practices to support positive teacher–student relationships. • Implement School-Based Interventions to Promote Empathy Related Responding in Children and Adolescents (effective when developmentally tailored and personalised). • Ensure adequate staff ratio of well-prepared teachers and support staff (psychologists, social workers). 	<p>Armstrong (2020).</p> <p>Armstrong <i>et al.</i> (2015) Duong & Bradshaw (2012), Kor <i>et al.</i> (2023), and Leuschner <i>et al.</i> (2017).</p> <p>Gallagher <i>et al.</i> (2019). Malti <i>et al.</i> (2016). Cullen <i>et al.</i> (2020); McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2020b); and Moore <i>et al.</i> (2019).</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider school climate and context (quality of leadership/response of leadership to incidents, sufficient funding to support at-risk students, school policies on behaviour). Create a school environment where students are subject to clear, consistent rule enforcement, plus efforts to minimise student tardiness, absence, class cutting, dropping out, apathy, and lack of preparation. Reduce teacher absence, increase parental involvement. 	<p>Peist <i>et al.</i> (2023). Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018).</p> <p>Eisman <i>et al.</i> (2020), and Kroeger (2019)</p> <p>Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018)</p>
Classroom level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure an individual behaviour support plan (BSP) and reasonable adjustments have been implemented for the student. Individualised, targeted interventions and supports for at-risk students. Ensure professional and emotional support from work colleagues. Adopt <i>Too Good for Violence</i> (program) Ensure teachers can use antecedent control. This involves upstream identification and avoidance of factors that can trigger student OV and acting on early warning signs (Functional Behaviour Assessment). This recommendation overlaps with the preventative strategies recommended by Armstrong <i>et al.</i> (2015) Duong & Bradshaw (2012), Kor <i>et al.</i> (2023), and Leuschner <i>et al.</i> (2017). 	<p>DRC (2023). Peist <i>et. Al.</i> (2023); Armstrong (2020); Moore <i>et al.</i> (2019); Armstrong <i>et al.</i> (2015). Stevenson <i>et al.</i> (2020). Moon and McCluskey (2018).</p> <p>Hall and Bacon (2005). Stevenson <i>et al.</i> (2020) Armstrong (2021).</p> <p>Armstrong <i>et al.</i> (2015). Armstrong <i>et al.</i> (2015) Duong & Bradshaw (2012), Kor <i>et al.</i> (2023), and Leuschner <i>et al.</i> (2017).</p>

Link 6: Key risk factors for occupational violence in school settings

On reviewing the literature, six risk factors were identified as influencing the likelihood of school staff experiencing harm from OV (Table 1).

Table 1: Risk factors related to OV directed at school staff.

Risk factors	Example	Sources
--------------	---------	---------

Teachers that exclusively or primarily instruct students with complex needs	Wei <i>et al.</i> (2013) 'In the current study, educators who worked in special education, compared with classroom teaching, were at increased risks of the threat of OV and of OV itself, respectively' (p. 81).	Stevenson <i>et al.</i> (2022) Armstrong, (2021); Wei <i>et al.</i> (2013) Tiesman <i>et al.</i> (2012).
Non-teaching, support staff e.g., social workers	McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2022a) 'School staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, school counsellors, instructional aides, school resource officers), a typically unexamined group, reported the highest rates of student physical violence, with 22% of staff reporting at least one incident of physical violence during COVID' (p. 2).	McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2022) Gerberich <i>et al.</i> (2013); Tiesman <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Gender of teacher	Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018) (N = 37,497) 'White, female teachers are among the teachers most likely to experience violence from students' (p. 272). It is noted this study did take the gender composition into account and this factor was controlled.	Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018); Tiesman <i>et al.</i> (2012).
Geographical location: Urban or suburban schools	McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2022b) 'Suburban and urban respondents were more likely to report an intention to quit the profession compared to respondents from rural regions' (p. 9). This statement is in reference to the likelihood of experiencing harm from OV. Specifically, if a teacher is from a suburban or urban area, they were more likely to experience harm from OV and, after receiving harm, to quit the profession compared to rural respondents.	Peist <i>et al.</i> (2023) McMahon <i>et al.</i> (2022); Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018) Tiesman <i>et al.</i> (2012).
Low socio-economic status (poverty, deprivation) areas experiencing community violence	Peist <i>et al.</i> (2023) (N =3403) 'This is a low-income neighbourhood with a few lockdowns per year because of gang activity. Many students are children of gang members.' (p. 9)	Peist <i>et al.</i> (2023) Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018) Tiesman <i>et al.</i> (2012).

School leadership (poor vs strong school leadership)	Peist <i>et al.</i> (2023) (N =3403). Approximately 42.7% of teachers described how administrators’ actions, or lack thereof, in response to violent incidents, contributed to considering or acting on a professional change.’ Administrators’ actions immediately following incidents often left teachers feeling unsupported’ (p.9)	Peist <i>et al.</i> (2023); Stevenson <i>et al.</i> (2022); Kapa <i>et al.</i> (2018).
--	--	--

It is evident based on the research that there are multiple risk factors contributing to OV which encompass a range of dimensions, including teaching specific student groups, certain occupational roles, gender disparities, school demographics, socioeconomic conditions, and the skill sets of school leadership.

Link 7: Occupational violence in healthcare settings

The review revealed that OV is identified as a major concern which affects health professions across Australia and globally (Grant et al. 2022). An international systematic review of OV affecting healthcare professionals, concluded that ‘occupational violence is frequent and constitutes a source of concern in the health system’ (Mento *et al.* 2020, p. 51). This literature supports the themes identified in the literature related to the educational sector.

A methodologically robust study by Spelten et al. (2020) estimates that 95% of Australian healthcare workers face OV (but does not detail with what frequency/over what period). Healthcare authorities in Victoria and beyond have devised comprehensive OV response policies and settings and have implemented OV-focused practice-based initiatives in response (Victorian DHSS, 2017).

A review of the responses to OV in healthcare settings highlights, that the environment, people, and practices used in these settings are not always relevant in school settings. Further explanation of these practices and why they are not relevant as part of this review can be found at Appendix A: OV management strategies used in healthcare settings.

Based on the reasons outlined in Appendix A, it was agreed that no further examination of the literature in relation to OV in healthcare was investigated. Readers should note that literature which referred to school-based OV however written by medically qualified mental health professionals (e.g., psychiatrists) has been included.

Conclusions

The literature review concludes that while there is significant research in relation to the management of OV, there is an absence of robust evidence of effective OV risk mitigation strategies in education settings. Workplace violence is a work health and safety risk and while robust legislative requirements are in place, school safety is a multifaceted issue and violence in schools is an increasingly prevalent issue worldwide. Other public service sectors such as healthcare experience similar or even higher levels of OV, however the prevention and management strategies used in these contexts are not always applicable in educational settings.

Of the relevant studies investigated, **various sources reference the need for positive and inclusive school climates that promote strong student engagement in learning, supported by effective parent school and community relationships.** Positive school climates attract and retain staff which in turn provides for appropriate teacher: student ratios in the event of an incident and supports positive teacher professional trajectories and length of time in the profession. The evidence suggests that **visibly supportive and active school leadership teams who utilise mentoring programs and ensure staff are well prepared through professional learning to respond to OV incidents, are well placed to manage the hazards related to OV.** Building school leader and staff resilience through positive mental health and self-care programs can also assist staff to manage and cope with the stresses related to OV. **School settings must be supported by effective WHS policies, student and staff mental health and self-care programs and robust risk-based safety systems that are focused on the prevention of violence.**

Addressing occupational violence in schools requires purposeful action, involving robust research initiatives, policy reforms, and targeted interventions across environmental, organisation and behavioural domains to ensure staff well-being and foster a safe educational environment.

Appendix A Literature review methodology

A scoping review methodology was selected as the applied method to review the literature and synthesise existing and emerging knowledge. This approach was necessary as the evidence base supporting successful ways to reduce OV in schools was found in many other related disciplines including psychology and behaviour science. Scoping reviews are most useful when the knowledge is complex and exists across different disciplines (Mak & Thomas 2022; Pham *et al.* 2014).

Additional benefits of a scoping review compared to a standard literature review include:

- **Aiding policy development:** Scoping reviews are optimal for policy development because they indicate gaps in the evidence base which aid policymaking (Mak & Thomas 2022).
- **Currency:** Scoping reviews include new or emerging knowledge about promising new interventions or practices (Munn *et al.* 2018).

The comprehensive scoping review process included the following approaches:

- Scopus search procedure** - A literature search using the global research database Scopus.
- Non-Scopus supplementary journal search** - A hand search of relevant Australian and international literature based on research team expertise.
- International research synthesis and best practice guidance reports** - A hand search of international evidence-based research syntheses and best-practice guidance reports pertinent to this project based on the research team expertise.
- Grey literature** - A search of 'grey' literature (non-peer reviewed) and policy.

Scopus search procedure

Research database

Scopus is an established, industry-standard, and broad-ranging research database with mature search features. Scopus is globally known as 'one of the largest curated abstract and citation databases, with a wide global and regional coverage of scientific journals, conference proceedings, and books, while ensuring only the highest quality data are indexed through rigorous content selection and re-evaluation by an independent Content Selection and Advisory Board' (Baas *et al.* 2020 p. 377).

Search criteria

English language publications in areas of education, psychology, social science, and education-related health sub-disciplines were well-represented in Scopus and included violent behaviour topics in schools (Armstrong 2021).

The search procedure was developed to include studies published in the last decade (2013 onwards), published in English, author affiliations with AU, UK, US, Germany, or NZ. Exclusion criteria included conference proceedings and non-peer reviewed (grey) literature.

Scopus search results were refined depending on the relevance of search results using combinations of the search terms: school AND violence AND behaviour / school AND prevention AND violence/ School AND safety AND teacher AND violence.

Search results

Most relevant search term combination found was school AND safety AND teacher AND violence.

Disciplines involved in research in this topic included Social Sciences (including psychology) followed by medicine.

The top journals (in order of articles published) included:

- Journal of School Violence
- Journal of Interpersonal Violence
- Journal of School Psychology
- Aggression and Violent Behaviour
- Behaviour Science

The Scopus search yielded 106 articles meeting the search inclusion/exclusion criteria. Results were hand checked and 51 articles were immediately excluded based on relevance. Several areas of literature were also excluded including gun violence in US schools, student-to student sexual violence and student-to student bullying features. Further analysis disclosed a final list of 12 relevant articles.

Non-Scopus supplementary journal search

In addition to the Scopus search, a supplementary hand search of the above journals was conducted. A hand search is a manual process to examine and identify further relevant studies and includes perusing the pages of key journals, conferences, and other sources, checking reference lists of identified articles and documents etc. Results from this hand search were cross-checked with the results from Scopus. A search of several pertinent peer-reviewed international journals (e.g., *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*) that contain useful literature was also conducted.

Total number of yielded articles are not reported in the non-SCOPUS supplementary journal search as they are based off the academics and subject matter experts personal experience and expertise in the field. This would not be repeatable by other researchers and applying numbers would imply that this would be possible, making it misleading.

International research and best-practice guidance reports

A synthesis of international evidence-based research and best practice guidance reports was conducted and found reference to the UK and US Government having developed research repositories used as ‘best practice’ sites for school leaders and for evidence-based policy development in education.

Guidance reports are described as ‘reports that summarise the best available research evidence on a particular aspect of teaching and learning, and present actionable recommendations for practice.’ (Educational Endowment Fund, 2023).

The Educational Endowment Fund (EEF) and the US-based Research and Evaluation Clearinghouses (US Department of Education) sites have been included in the scoping review.

The EEF published three Guidance Reports which mention OV as follows:

- i. Improving Behaviour in Schools (2021).

Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/behaviour>

- ii. Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools: Create a positive learning environment for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). *Available at:*

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/send>

- iii. The EEF has also published guidance on evidence-based behaviour Interventions – specifically interventions effective at reducing challenging (violent, aggressive) behaviour.

Available at: [Behaviour interventions | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

There are over 30 different interventions available depending on the type of behaviour, age of the young person and type of skill being taught.

More interventions available here: [Teaching and Learning Toolkit | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

The Research and Evaluation Clearinghouse (Education) has a useful search function to review existing research studies in terms of quality and potential for school or classroom use. It referenced one source pertinent to this review. Using the search function and search term ‘violence’ - an article by Hall and Bacon (2005) met the quality criteria specified by the Research and Evaluation Clearinghouse (Education). Hall and Bacon (2005) examined the *Too Good for Violence* program that was rated by Research and Evaluation Clearinghouse as a potentially positive program.

Available at: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Additionally, the US-based Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) ([About CASEL - CASEL](#)) group is regarded as the peak organisation globally for advancing school based social and emotional learning (SEL) with a robust reputation for evaluation of SEL programs. The CASEL website has a

search engine based on evidence informed SEL programs. This website was searched using the pre-set search terms: (1.) reduced problem behaviours and (2.) reduced emotional distress, for information pertinent to middle and high-school age groups. The search found a single appropriate program pertinent to this review. Available at: [Caring School Community - CASEL Program Guide](#)

Grey literature

Grey literature is information produced outside of traditional publishing and distribution channels, and can include governmental reports and policy literature, reports by non-government organisations, working papers, newsletters, speeches, white papers, websites, and other non-peer reviewed sources, etc.

A desk-based search of policy and grey literature was undertaken and revealed several sources of pertinent literature including:

- i. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), (2020) *National strategy to address the abuse of teachers, school leaders and other school staff* by the (Federal) Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Available at: https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/abuse-strategy/national-strategy-to-address-the-abuse-of-teachers-school-leaders-and-other-school-staff.pdf?sfvrsn=6bb0d93c_2
- ii. American Psychological Association (APA). (2022) *Violence Against Educators and School Personnel: Crisis During COVID Technical Report*. American Psychological Association (APA). Available at: <https://www.apa.org/education-career/k12/violence-educators-technical-report.pdf>
- iii. Disability Royal Commission (DRC). (2023) *Disability Royal Commission Final Report Volume 7 Inclusive education, employment and housing*. Available at: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-7-inclusive-education-employment-and-housing>.
- iv. A statement by David Armstrong in 2020 to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Armstrong, 2020). Available at: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/exhibit-7-11-stat017000010001-statement-david-armstrong>.
- v. An independent review of OV in ACT public schools conducted by David Caple in 2017 (*Provided by the Education Directorate*).

Appendix B References

- Adams, J. & Mrug, S. (2019). Individual- and school-level predictors of violence perpetration, victimization, and perceived safety in middle and high schools, *Journal of School Violence*, 18:3, 468-482, DOI: 10.1080/15388220.2018.1528551
- ACT Government, WorkSafe ACT (2023) <https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/health-and-safety-portal/safety-topics/psychosocial-hazards>
- Aldrup, K., Klusmann, U., Lüdtke, O., Göllner, R., & Trautwein, U. (2018). Student misbehaviour and teacher well-being: Testing the mediating role of the teacher-student relationship. *Learning and instruction*, 58, 126-136.
- Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership (AITSL) (2020). National strategy to address the abuse of teachers, school leaders and other school staff. AITSL. Available at: https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/abuse-strategy/national-strategy-to-address-the-abuse-of-teachers-school-leaders-and-other-school-staff.pdf?sfvrsn=6bb0d93c_2
- Australian Government (2024) [Workplace violence and aggression - Workplace violence and aggression | Safe Work Australia](#)
- Armstrong, D. (2021). Can school psychologists be inclusive when delivering evidence-based behavioural interventions in special schools, behaviour units or clinics? A systematic mapping literature review. *Review of Education*, 9(3), e3271.
- Armstrong, D. (2018). Addressing the wicked problem of behaviour in schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(9), 997-1013.
- Armstrong, D., Hallett, F., Elliott, J., & Hallett, G. (2015). *Understanding Child and Adolescent behaviour*. Cambridge University Press.
- Armstrong, D. (2020.) EXHIBIT 7-11 - STAT.0170.0001.0001 - Statement of David Armstrong. Disability Royal Commission. Available at: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/exhibit-7-11-stat017000010001-statement-david-armstrong>
- Australian Government. (2024a) Business: Work health and safety. Available at: [Work health and safety | business.gov.au](#)
- Australian Government. (2024b). Department of Education. Workplace Health and Safety Policy. Available at: [Work Health and Safety Policy - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

Baas J., Schotten, M., Plume, A., Côté, G., & Karimi, R. (2020). Scopus as a curated, high-quality bibliometric data source for academic research in quantitative science studies. *Quantitative Science Studies*, (1): 377–386. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00019

Bare K.; McMahon S.D.; Molina E.G.; Tergesen C. & Zinter K.E. (2022). Chapter 40. Educator experiences as victims of school violence: Emerging perspectives and research. In *Research Anthology on Interventions in Student Behavior and Misconduct*. pp755-779.

Boyd, B. A., Stahmer, A. C., Odom, S. L., Wallisch, A., & Matheis, M. (2022). It's time to close the research to practice gap in autism: The need for implementation science. *Autism*, 26(3), 569-574.

Boyle C, Sanders MR, Ma T, Hodges J, Allen KA, Cobham VE, Darmawan I, Dittman CK, Healy KL, Hepburn SJ, MacLeod LM, Teng J, & Trompf M. (2023). The thriving kids and parents school's project: protocol of an incomplete stepped wedged cluster randomised trial evaluating the effectiveness of a Triple P seminar series. *BMC Public Health*. doi: 10.1186/s12889-023-16962-4. PMID: 37848856; PMCID: PMC10580655. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37848856/>

Caple, D. (2017). Independent Assessment – Occupational Violence Final Report

Carden, C. (2017). 'As parents congregated at parties': Responsibility and blame in media representations of violence and school closure in an Indigenous community. *Journal of Sociology*, 53 (3) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783317722855>

Chang, F. & Munoz, M. (2006). School Personnel Educating the Whole Child: Impact of Character Education on Teachers' Self-Assessment and Student Development. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 19. 35-49. 10.1007/s11092-007-9036-5.

Cullen, M.A., Lindsay, G., Hastings, R., Denne, L., Stanford, C., Beqaa, L., Elahi, F., Gemegah, E., Hayden, N., Kander, I., Lykomitrou F., & Zander, J. (2020). *Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools: Evidence Review*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available from: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Send/EEF_SEND_Evidence_Review.pdf

Duong J & Bradshaw CP. (2013). Using the extended parallel process model to examine teachers' likelihood of intervening in bullying. *J Sch Health*. 2013; 83: 422-429.

Eisman A.B.; Heinze J.; Kilbourne A.M.; Franzen S.; Melde C.; & McGarrell E. (2020). Comprehensive approaches to addressing mental health needs and enhancing school security: A hybrid type II cluster randomized trial. *Health and Justice*, 8:2.

Espelage, D., Anderman, E. M., Brown, V. E., Jones, A., Lane, K. L., McMahon, S. D., Reddy, L. A. & Reynolds, C. R. (2013). Understanding and preventing violence directed against teachers: Recommendations for a national research, practice, and policy agenda. *American Psychologist*, 68(2), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031307>

Esteves, J., Perry, A., Spiegel, R., & Weiss, J. A. (2021). Occurrence and predictors of challenging behavior in youth with intellectual disability with or without autism. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 14(2), 189-201.

Fray, L., Jaremus, F., Gore, J. *et al.* (2022). Schooling upheaval during COVID-19: troubling consequences for students' return to school. *Aust. Educ. Res.* 50, 1533–1550 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00572-x>

Gallagher, E.K., Dever, B.V., Hochbein, C. *et al.* (2019). Teacher Caring as a Protective Factor: The Effects of Behavioral/Emotional Risk and Teacher Caring on Office Disciplinary Referrals in Middle School. *School Mental Health* 11, 754–765 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-019-09318-0>

Gerberich, S. G., Nachreiner, N. M., Ryan, A. D., Church, T. R., McGovern, P. M., Geisser, M. S., . . . & Pinder, E. D. (2014). Case-control study of student-perpetrated physical violence against educators. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 24(5), 325-332. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2014.02.006>

Grant, S. L., Hartanto, S., Sivasubramaniam, D., and Heritage, K. (2022). Occupational violence and aggression in urgent and critical care in rural health service settings: A systematic review of mixed studies. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30, e3696–e3715. 10.1111/hsc.14039

Hall, B. W., & Bacon, T. P. (2005). Building a foundation against violence: Impact of a school-based prevention program on elementary students. *Journal of School Violence*, 4(4), 63-83.

Hudson Davis A.M.; Bourne P.A. (2016). Implementing effective programs to increase safety and reduce bullying in Connecticut private schools, USA: A policy perspective.

Humphrey, N., Lendrum, A., Wigelsworth, M., & Greenberg, M. T. (Eds.). (2020). *Social and emotional learning*. Routledge.

Kapa, R. R., Luke, J., Moulthrop, D. & Gimbert, B. (2018). Teacher victimization in authoritative school environments. *Journal of School Health*, 88(4), 272-280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12607>

Kor K.; Simpson H.; & Fabrianesi B. (2023). Strengthening Schools' Responses to Students' Harmful Sexual Behaviors: A Scoping Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 2023, Vol. 24(4) 2726–2742

Kroeger J. (2019). School-community partnerships for inclusion(s) of LGBTQI youth and families. In Sheldon, S. B., & Turner-Vorbeck, T. A. (Eds.). (2019). *The Wiley Handbook of Family, School, and Community Relationships in Education*. John Wiley & Sons.

Leuschner V.; Fiedler N.; Schultze M.; Ahlig N.; Göbel K.; Sommer F.; Scholl J.; Cornell D.; & Scheithauer H. (2017). Prevention of Targeted School Violence by Responding to Students' Psychosocial Crises: The NETWASS Program. *Child Development*, January/February 2017, Volume 88, Number 1, Pages 68-82

Lippell, K. (2016) Addressing Occupational Violence: An Overview of conceptual and policy considerations viewed through a gender lens. Working paper 5/2016. International Labour Office – Geneva

Lowe, E., Picknoll, D., Chivers, P., Farrington, F., & Rycroft, P. (2020). Teacher-directed violence by students in Western Australia: An exploratory study. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 187-202.

Mak, S. & Thomas, A. (2022). Steps for Conducting a Scoping Review. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*. 14(5) 2022 Oct. Available at [Steps for Conducting a Scoping Review - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

Maslach, C. (1976). Burned-out. *Human Behavior*, 5, 16-22.

McMahon, S.D., Anderman, E.M., Astor, R.A., Espelage, D.L., Martinez, A., Reddy, L.A., & Worrell, F.C. (2022a). Violence Against Educators and School Personnel: Crisis During COVID. Policy Brief. American Psychological Association.

McMahon, S. D., Anderman, E. M., Astor, R. A., Espelage, D. L., Martinez, A., Reddy, L. A., & Worrell, F. C. (2022b). Violence against Educators and School Personnel: Crisis during COVID. Technical Report. American Psychological Association.

McMahon S.D.; Reaves S.; McConnell E.A.; Peist E.; Ruiz L.; Espelage D.; Reddy L.A.; Anderman E.M.; Lane K.; Reynolds C.R.; Jones A.; & Brown V. (2017). The Ecology of Teachers' Experiences with Violence and Lack of Administrative Support. *Am J Community Psychol* (2017) 60:502–515. DOI 10.1002/ajcp.12202

Mento, C., Silvestri, M. C., Bruno, A., Muscatello, M. R. A., Cedro, C., Pandolfo, G., & Zoccali, R. A. (2020). Workplace violence against healthcare professionals: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 51, 101381.

Moon, B., & McCluskey, J. (2020). An exploratory study of violence and aggression against teachers in middle and high schools: Prevalence, predictors, and negative consequences. *Journal of School Violence*, 19(2), 122-137.

Munn, Z., Peters, M. D., Stern, C., Tufanaru, C., McArthur, A., & Aromataris, E. (2018). Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping review approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 18, 1-7.

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). (2022). Press release.

https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/07_06_2022.asp

Olivier E.; Janosz M.; Morin A.J.S.; Archambault I.; Geoffrion S.; Pascal S.; Goulet J.; Marchand A.; & Pagani L.S. (2021). Chronic and Temporary Exposure to Student Violence Predicts Emotional Exhaustion in High School Teachers, *Journal of School Violence*, 20:2, 195-211, DOI: 10.1080/15388220.2021.1875841

Osher, D; Poirier, J; Jarjoura, R; Brown, R; and & Kendziora, K (2014). Avoid Simple Solutions and Quick Fixes: Lessons Learned From a Comprehensive Districtwide Approach to Improving Student Behavior and School Safety, *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 16. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol5/iss2/16>

Oubrahim, L., & Combalbert, N. (2021). Frequency and origin (reactive/proactive) of aggressive behavior in young people with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 67(3), 209-216.

Patel, V., Flisher, A. J., Nikapota, A., & Malhotra, S. (2008). Promoting child and adolescent mental health in low- and middle-income countries. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(3), 313-334.

Peist, E., McMahon, S. D., Davis-Wright, J. O., & Keys, C. B. (2023). Understanding teacher-directed violence and related turnover through a school climate framework. *Psychology in the Schools*. DOI: 10.1002/pits.23044

Reddy L.A.; Espelage D.L.; Anderman E.M.; Kanrich J.B.; & McMahon S.D. (2018). Violence Against Teachers: Case Studies from the APA Task Force. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 42, Pages 9-28,

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability Final Report (DRC, 2023). *Volume 7, Inclusive education, employment, and housing*. Available at:

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-7-inclusive-education-employment-and-housing>

Safe Work Australia (2024) Safe Work Australia Available at: [Welcome | Safe Work Australia](#)

Shaddock, A., Packer, S., & Roy, A. (2015). Schools for all children and young people: *Report of the expert panel on students with complex needs and challenging behaviour*. ACT Education Directorate.

Spelten, E., Thomas, B., O'Meara, P., van Vuuren, J., and McGillion, A. (2020). Violence against emergency department nurses; can we identify the perpetrators? *PloS One*, 15(4), e0230793

Stevenson, D. J., Neill, J. T., Ball, K., Smith, R., & Shores, M. C. (2022). How do preschool to year 6 educators prevent and cope with occupational violence from students? *Australian Journal of Education*, 66(2), 154-170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221092472>

Tiesman H.; Konda S.; Hendricks S.; Mercer D.; Amandus H. (2013). Workplace violence among Pennsylvania education workers: Differences among occupations. *Journal of Safety Research*, 44, 65-71

US Department of Education (2023). *Guiding Principles for creating safe inclusive, supportive, and fair school climates*. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

Victorian Department of Health (2017) Occ Victorian DOH (2017) Occupational violence and aggression – security. Victoria Department of Health. Available at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/worker-health-wellbeing/occupational-violence-and-aggression-security>

Vincent C.G., Walker H., Espelage D.L., Murray C., Svanks R., Pennefather J., Valido A., & Marquez B. (2022). Initial Field Test of the SOARS (Student Ownership, Accountability, and Responsibility for School Safety) Framework for High Schools. *NASSP Bulletin* 2022, Vol. 106(2) 154–176

Voight A. & Nation M. (2016). Practices for Improving Secondary School Climate: A Systematic Review of the Research Literature. *Am. J. Community Psychol* (2016) 58:174–191 DOI 10.1002/ajcp.12074

Wei, C., Gerberich, S. G., Alexander, B. H., Ryan, A. D., Nachreiner, N. M., & Mongin, S. J. (2013). Work-related violence against educators in Minnesota: Rates and risks based on hours exposed. *Journal of Safety Research*, 44, 73-85.

APPENDIX C: Challenges and strategies related to OV management in the healthcare sector compared to education settings

Challenges/strategies	OV management strategies	Application in education settings
Causes of OV by patients in healthcare settings	Many perpetrators of OV in health settings are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol (Mayhew and Chappel, 2003) or have dementia (Grant et al. 2022). Spelten et al. (2020) highlight that in many cases, ‘patients became violent because of an underlying medical condition, such as delirium, sepsis or hypoxia.’ (p. 15). Medical treatment of the underlying driver for OV will in many cases reduce aggressive symptoms.	These factors do not appear to be the cause of most cases of OV in schools and these are incomparable with many cases of OV in hospitals for this reason.
Adult demographic dominates literature about OV in healthcare settings.	Literature on OV in healthcare overwhelmingly focuses on adults (Aljohani et al. 2021) as opposed to minors.	Adults by virtue of being over the age of 18, for instance, have a different legal status in terms of responsibility for their actions, when compared to school-age students (DOH, 2023, Parliament of Australia, 2024)
Use of security services	Patients who present with OV face physical expulsion from hospital by security and/or being detained by security personnel pending the arrival of police (DOH, 2024).	Schools in Australia do not routinely have dedicated security services.
Chemical restraint (forced or voluntary) of those presenting with OV	Chemical restraint, resulting in sedation, is used by health settings in a significant number of cases in responding to OV chemical restraint is often in conjunction with physical restraint (AMA Victoria, 2005) and is classed as part of the wider suite of restrictive interventions (DOH, 2023).	Teachers are not qualified to administer chemical restraints, and in hospital settings this is done by a medical team with specialist training (AMA, 2005).

Forced restraint	Forced restraint can be used as a response to OV in healthcare settings, often enforced as a last resort where there may be safety concerns by security and/or a team of medical staff with specialist training plus psychical strength, and, in many cases with the use of chemical restraint (AMA, 2005).	Practically, this combination of human resources is not available in schools to enable safe forced restraint.
Legality	There are legal issues with the use of forced restraint in school contexts and which is commonly referred to as a restrictive practice.	In the context of students with a disability, The Disability Royal Commission Final Report (DRC, 2023) firmly recommends that physical restraint and seclusion (where the student is placed alone in a secure room) immediately cease. The DRC (2023) report specifically recommends that there is an 'End [to] legal authorisation for use of restrictive practices' (p. 11).

bluebird



Review of Occupational Violence in ACT Public Schools

Listening Report

ACT Education Directorate

January 2024



Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Approach and Methodology.....	4
3	Key Findings.....	6
4	Conclusion	19
5	Appendix A Terminology Used by Interviewees.....	21
6	Appendix B References.....	24



1 Introduction

This listening report has been conducted to aid the development of a systemised risk management framework to prevent and reduce Occupational Violence (OV) in ACT public schools in the context of Work Health and Safety practice. This report addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers and educational stakeholders in relation to OV?
2. How is the Directorate responding to OV in the educational workplace?
3. How are the OV risk mitigation, safety systems, and processes working in practice?

As for educational institutions worldwide, Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Public Schools face multifaceted challenges in ensuring school safety. In a 2022 survey of government primary school staff in the ACT almost two-thirds of respondents reported abusive language, and two-fifths respectively reported physical aggression, and experiences of other threatening behaviour from students (Stevenson *et al.* 2022 p. 154).

With reports of increasing rates of school-based OV and serious incidents involving student behaviours, it is timely for the ACT Education Directorate to seek a greater understanding of the complex nature of the issues involved in maintaining safe working and learning environments. To address the challenges of OV in schools, an understanding of the context, causes and consequences is essential in ensuring effective prevention and early intervention strategies (Lippell, 2016).

This listening report outlines the findings from interviews conducted in 2023-24 with selected public schools' staff, Education Support Office (ESO) staff and external stakeholders in the ACT. The purpose of these interviews was to uncover the lived experiences of OV, gain insights into the Directorate's current response to OV, and assess how OV risk mitigation, safety systems, and processes are working in practice.

This report will guide the ACT Education Directorate's Review into the Prevention and Management of Occupational Violence in ACT public schools. As part of this review, the listening report will also be used to inform the development of the following review deliverables:

- Desktop Review and Gap Analysis Report
- Occupational Violence Risk Management Framework
- Implementation Roadmap.



2 Approach and Methodology

2.1 Listening Report Approach

The Listening Report provides a comprehensive summary of the insights pertaining to 42 interviews conducted with three key stakeholder groups, including:

- Selected staff within ACT public schools (16 interviews);
- Education Support Office (ESO) staff (23 interviews); and
- External stakeholders (3 interviews).

2.2 Stakeholder Engagement Methodology

The format for the interviews conducted are outlined in Table 2 . The information discussed in many of the interviews was sensitive in nature, and trauma-informed interviewing techniques were applied to protect the psychological safety and wellbeing of both the interviewers and interviewees.

Table 1 2: Interview Information

	ACT Public Schools	Education Support Office (ESO)	External Stakeholders
Interview Objectives	Assessing how OV risk mitigation, safety systems, and processes are working in practice in their respective schools.	Gaining insights into the Directorate’s current response to OV.	Seeking additional perspectives to the Directorate’s current approach to OV.
Format	In person/virtual interviews (60-120 minutes)	In person/virtual interviews (30-60 minutes)	In person/virtual interviews (60 minutes)
Number of interviews	16	23	3
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals/grouped school representatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals/grouped ESO members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual stakeholders • Limited Bluebird team members



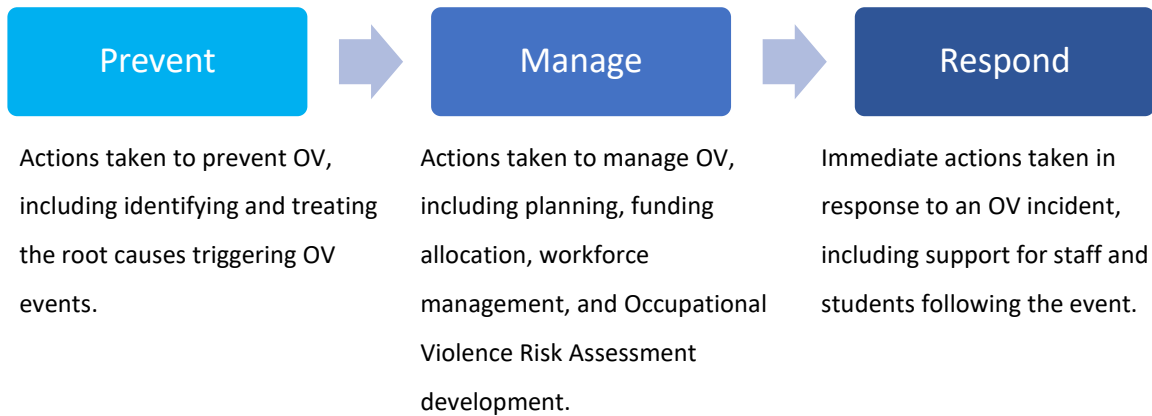
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A representative from the Directorate• Limited Bluebird team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited Bluebird team members	
--	---	---	--



3 Key Findings

A thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews with selected stakeholders was completed. Key findings have been categorised into three temporal groupings: 1. Prevention of OV; 2. Management of OV occurrences; and 3. Responses to occupational violence.

Figure 1 3: OV prevention, management, and response process



3.1 Prevention of OV

Eleven key themes emerged from the interviews outlining how to prevent OV in ACT public schools.

P-1 The measures currently in place do not adequately prevent the risk of OV in schools.

Interviewees reported that the Occupational Violence Risk Assessment (OVRA) process identifies controls to manage OV which may include additional staffing or modifications to the physical environment. Staff from public schools and staff from the Education Support Office (ESO) said that there is insufficient attention given to identifying and addressing the root causes of OV issues, leading to a primarily reactive OV support system.

School-based staff expressed a desire for appropriate professional learning, training, interventions, and resources to support students, including access to flexible funding to intervene early and prevent OV from occurring, rather than having to wait for an incident to occur. Principals suggested that earlier intervention could lead to a decrease in incidents occurring.



P-2 Information sharing and collaboration at key transition points can help prevent recurring incidents of OV.

Several interviewees expressed that information sharing at the point of transition was critical to enable preparation and planning where a student had been involved in previous incidents of OV at their former school, or if they had a pre-existing OVRA. Where sensitive information sharing was able to occur, schools could plan and prepare for students transition to the new environment.

Interviewees expressed that if relevant information was shared at all, it was often too late to enable schools to consider the risks and personalise supports for the individual student within the new setting. It was also consistently raised that communication was often informal, relationship dependent, and primarily reliant on goodwill particularly in the case where students were moving from interstate or non-government schools. When asked why this may be the case, interviewees expressed a reluctance to share student information for fear of breaching privacy laws. This was viewed by interviewees as a practice, that increased the risk of an OV incident occurring.

P-3 While Learning Support Assistants (LSA's) play an important support role, they are not a long-term solution for the prevention of OV.

ACT public school staff identified that additional staffing was often recommended as a control to assist in the management of OV. Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) were reported to form the largest group employed to provide support in the classroom and the playground to help manage OV.

It was highlighted that there is a high degree of variability in the capability and skillsets of LSA's. There was limited (to no measured evidence) supporting LSAs' effectiveness in OV reduction. Staff highlighted that although there are certifications for LSA's, these certifications are not mandatory, and there are no formal qualification requirements to become an LSA, leading to a variety of capability levels amongst the cohort. The



employment of LSA's was identified as a significant financial cost to schools and the Directorate.

School staff also commented that when an OVRA identifies additional staffing as a risk mitigation measure, this can be counterintuitive as more staff are then exposed to the risk of OV. Where there is more than one student in a class with an OVRA, identifying an LSA as the control, results in multiple staff employed to support individual students within the same classroom, which increases the number of people in a classroom that the teacher must manage.

P-4 There are varying attitudes and opinions towards the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) framework, and the framework is not universally implemented.

Interviewees provided conflicting opinions on the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) framework. ACT public school staff generally regarded PBL as effective in preventing and addressing OV by establishing clear expectations for students and staff. Some ACT public school staff felt that PBL approaches are a 'one-size fits all' approach and noted that it has not been implemented at their school(s).

Staff from the ESO also held various views on PBL. The majority expressed that PBL had a positive impact. Specific comments were raised that though PBL has been implemented in most ACT public schools, the effectiveness of PBL has not been systematically measured. It was reported that an evaluation of the effectiveness of PBL in ACT schools is occurring during 2024.

P-5 Trauma informed professional learning should be mandatory.

ACT public school staff and ESO staff have a shared belief that professional learning in trauma informed/sensitive practice is required for educators. This specific training was felt to be necessary to better understand students who live with trauma or adverse childhood experiences to increase understanding and improve teaching and in-class behaviour management.



P-6 External influences negatively impact teachers in their workplace.

ACT public school staff and ESO staff talked about the prevalence of OV in schools being significantly influenced by wider societal pressures, with the COVID-19 pandemic playing a pivotal role.

It was a commonly held view that cost of living pressures, isolation through lockdowns, a lack of available therapeutic supports within the community and other environmental stressors have negatively impacted the behaviour of students and families which influences how they engage with schools. It was identified by staff across schools and ESO that schools are a microcosm of society more broadly, and that when social pressures increase, and life dynamics change for families there is a direct impact on students and schools.

P-7 A lack of casual relief staff and unplanned leave places pressure on remaining school staff and increases the likelihood of an OV incident occurring.

Both ESO and school-based interviewees said that data on unplanned personal leave suggests a connection between increased staff unplanned leave and the teacher workforce shortage. A consequence of unplanned leave that was highlighted by interviewees, is that there are not enough educators available to backfill positions left unexpectedly vacant, which has a negative impact on the remaining workforce who must fill the gaps and continue to support their normal workload. It was noted that there had been an increase in staff accessing unplanned personal leave for a range of reasons including but not limited to:

- changes to health settings strongly encouraging parents to keep children home when they are displaying cold and flu symptoms impacts teaching parents with most of the workforce being female it is likely that they play a key role in caring for children when they are sick;
- accessing surgeries and medical procedures that were delayed because of COVID-19;
- fatigue due to a lack of available relief staff
- increased work demands and the psychological impact of managing increasingly difficult student and parent behaviour.



School staff referenced that fact that when there were changes to familiar staffing due to unplanned leave, some students respond negatively to the change in routine and become dysregulated leading to a higher likelihood of an OV incident occurring.

Interviewees commented that professional learning on responding to and managing complex behaviours decreases the impact of OV. Interviewees further commented that teachers have limited capacity for undertaking professional learning due to limited availability of relief teachers to cover for them whilst they are attending the professional learning.

P-8 There is a need for strong parent and school partnerships.

ACT public school staff, ESO staff and external stakeholders all expressed that there is a disconnect between parents' expectations and the explicit role of teachers. ACT public school staff said that a greater emphasis should be placed on the importance of managing the evolving dynamic between parents and schools. School staff stated that the most successful interventions for students occurred when there was a strong partnership between schools and families. Many ACT public school staff reported experiencing OV from parents when discussing their child's behaviour or learning progress. This description was consistent amongst staff from various ACT public schools, largely described as threatening behaviour and degrading remarks delivered via email, text, or verbally.

P-9 Community support services for students and families are lacking or inaccessible.

Stakeholders from all areas raised concerns that OV prevention relies on support from the wider community and services such as access to paediatricians and allied health professionals. There was commentary that the availability of community support services for students with disabilities, developmental delays, mental health issues and trauma experiences is lacking. The challenges resulting from a lack of availability of community support structures, such as allied health services, was seen as a contributing factor to OV.

P-10 Strong teacher practices in teaching and learning and behaviour management are a mitigating factor to the prevention of OV.



Students who are highly engaged in quality learning activities are less likely to engage in acts of OV according to interviewees. It was stated that strong teaching and learning practices, including differentiation, and learning adjustments would positively engage students, which in turn reduces the likelihood of disruption. Staff identified a continuum of student behaviours that ranged from disengaged and disruptive to more challenging behaviours that if not managed and responded to early, could escalate and result in an OV incident occurring. The teacher's ability to successfully intervene early resulted in positive outcomes for student behaviour and engagement in learning.

P-11 Early intervention in early childhood reduces OV risk.

It was noted by both school and ESO interviewees that the cohort of students that contributed the highest number of OV incidents were in Kindergarten to Year 2. Interviewees commented that when children experience communication difficulties and have trouble understanding teacher expectation there was a higher likelihood of an OV incident occurring. School staff said that early intervention for speech and language developmental delays, physical disabilities and learning difficulties supports young people in developing skills to overcome communication difficulties and work through frustrations with difficult tasks without becoming aggressive.

3.2 Management of OV

Eight key themes emerged from the interviews outlining how to manage OV in ACT public schools.

M-1 The definition of OV and what should be reported requires consistency within the Directorate.



While the Directorate has defined OV in the context of ACT public schools, this definition of OV has not been consistently embedded or understood at an individual level. This has led to inconsistent reporting, including reporting of incidents that are not OV (for example a young person swearing in a sentence could be reported as OV which is not the same as a young person verbally abusing a teacher).

M-2 Roles and responsibilities in managing OV processes need clarifying.

There was a lack of shared understanding between ACT public school staff, ESO staff and external stakeholders of the roles and responsibilities in managing, preventing, and responding to OV. The framing of student behaviours that meet the definition of OV has caused confusion about what should and should not be tolerated by ACT public school staff. Some educators indicated they had difficulty in finding and accessing information on the OVRA process and other ESO support for managing complex behaviours.

M-3 OV is often viewed as only a Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) issue, without considering students' needs.

Interviewees identified that OV is a Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) issue which focuses on the impact on ACT public school staff. There was a sense amongst interviewees that this detracted from the needs of the student to address the underlying causes of OV.

M-4 There is a strong reporting culture across schools however barriers remain.

ACT public school staff expressed that they have implemented, or are starting to implement, strong OV reporting cultures in their schools. Both school and ESO staff said that there is a broad acceptance that ACT public school staff are required to report OV using the Whole of Government Incident Management Reporting Tool (Riskman). This has led to an increase in the reporting of OV instances in ACT public schools according to interviewees. Specifically, an interviewee said that it is unclear whether the noticed increase in OV incidents is being driven by actual increase in OV events or an increase in educators reporting of OV or perceived OV incidents.



ESO staff commented that there are differences in reporting amongst key groups of staff. Under-reporting has been observed amongst LSA's, casual employees, and graduates and attributed to unfamiliarity with reporting systems and processes. These groups may also have concerns that reporting will impact their employment. Generally, a stigma around reporting still exists, with ACT public school staff expressing that they decided not to report because it feels too 'dramatic' and the perception that reporting OV negatively impacts the school's reputation in the community, and their own professional reputation.

It was highlighted that principals contribute the lowest number of incident reports, which was seen to be inconsistent with media and other reports relating to OV in schools and the impact on school leaders. It was perceived that a lack of reporting did not accurately capture the experiences of school principals.

M-5 OVRAs are greatly appreciated by staff but improvements to the process are needed.

ACT public school staff expressed appreciation for the support they receive from the ESO during OVRAs.

Ovra meetings occur in a group setting and soon after an incident occurs often when emotions are heightened. This results in potential vicarious trauma, distress amongst attendees and an exacerbation of the issues/incidents which may not accurately capture the severity of the behaviours that led to the development of the Ovra. While Ovra's seek to manage a student's current behaviour, they do not seek to understand the function of the behaviour or address the underlying root causes.

The design of the Ovra process was seen as potentially re-traumatising for staff and increasing the risk of vicarious trauma. ACT public school staff and ESO staff noted that it can be overwhelming to be involved in an Ovra and they feel there is insufficient time for reflection and decompression before starting the Ovra process.

ACT public school staff and ESO staff expressed that there was available data that was not taken into consideration when assessing an Ov risk. Interviewees highlighted that data, such as attendance and school transfer histories, could be helpful when assessing Ov risks. These



additional data points may provide further context regarding complex student behaviour and ensure controls are proportionate to the whole situation.

M-6 Students with OVRA's are negatively stigmatised.

ESO staff commented that young people with OVRA's in place may be labelled as "an OVRA kid." Young people often maintain this reputation throughout their schooling and that this stigma influences the way they are treated by ACT public school staff. It was noted that this also impacted the way that students saw themselves.

ACT public school staff and ESO staff raised that OV risk is increased if students have a perception of not being welcomed back into the classroom. ACT public school staff explicitly stated that OV incidences are reduced when a positive school culture focused on successful re-entry practices are in place.

M-7 There is no current process for OVRA's to be ceased for individual students.

ACT public school staff stated that they do not expect any student's OVRA be removed. There were similar points raised by ESO staff that 'once a student has an OVRA, it is expected to follow them throughout their schooling.' Stakeholders in interviews expressed that because OVRA risk ratings are rarely re-assessed or reduced, students are expected to have OVRA's in place indefinitely, which results in negative stigmatisation of students.

During the interviews, interviewees reported facing challenges due to unfilled positions within the OV team, alongside a rising number of students qualifying for an OVRA. As a result, the team had directed their resources primarily towards addressing immediate and emerging risks. This focus impacted their ability to reassess and update existing risk ratings.

It was noted by interviewees that schools were reluctant to reduce risk ratings when there was a correlating impact on resourcing for fear that the underlying issues would return, and OV incidents would occur/increase and the process would have to start again.

M-8 Staff feel unable to decompress after incidents



ACT public school staff commented that they felt unable to decompress after OV incidents. School staff stated that they felt unable to take unplanned leave to rest and recover as there is often not an appropriate replacement staff member or relief teacher available. A lack of unplanned leave taken after an OV incident was described as increasing the overall impact of the OV incident.

3.3 Response to OV

Nine key themes emerged from the interviews outlining how to respond to OV in ACT public schools.

R-1 ACT public school staff said they receive solid support from ESO.

ACT public school leaders and staff acknowledged that they feel generally supported by the Directorate in response to OV. Support from the OV team, Early Intervention and Wellbeing team, People and Conduct team, and School Operations team was praised.

R-2 ESO and ACT public school staff differed on opinions regarding funding.

ACT public school staff expressed that they felt there was not adequate funding to meet the OV challenges that schools face. ESO staff said that there was ample funding for schools to address OV concerns.

R-3 Collaboration between schools and parents is important to effectively respond to OV.

While there is allied health support for students at ACT public schools, there are some external health services that parents are responsible for helping their child access outside of school (such as specialists, paediatricians, and general practitioners). ACT public school staff said that without the families accessing or giving consent for their child to access these services, ACT public school staff are limited in the support they can provide the young person. An example raised was that a young person cannot obtain a diagnosis without attending relevant health appointments outside of school. ACT public school staff and ESO staff both reflected that partnership and collaboration between parents and schools as



critical to ensuring that young people in need of specialist support can access external supports, especially in situations in which OV has occurred.

R-4 Data has been used in varying degrees by ACT public school staff when responding to OV.

Some ACT public school staff said that they had implemented rigorous data collection processes to employ data-driven approaches to effectively respond to OV.

ESO staff said that data use ensures a proactive response to emerging OV trends and reduction in unsuccessful interventions. ACT public school staff's low data literacy and limited time capacity to analyse OV related data was expressed as a major limitation to using the available data dashboards to support effective responses to OV.

R-5 The current system does not support accurate incident reporting.

ACT public school staff said they are unable to relate to the language used within Riskman, finding the system too abstract which has negatively impacted accurate reporting. One observed example is that a 'psychological injury' requires the participant to select parts of the head that were injured, offering 'left back head,' 'left front head,' 'right back head' and 'right front head.'

R-6 OVRA controls are not assessed for effectiveness.



Several ESO staff members expressed concern about OVRA controls not adhering to best practice or being evaluated to ensure the quality and effectiveness of controls, noting “we sometimes question the recommendations.” Whilst in most instances a review of each OVRA takes place two to five weeks after the initial development and implementation to assess the effectiveness of the controls, there is an opportunity for the Directorate to review the effectiveness of each control type across many OVRA’s. In addition, ACT public school staff said they often need guidance on how to successfully implement controls and what to do if they could not implement controls due to operational limitations.

OVRA controls are developed on a student-by-student basis, including the recommendations for staffing as a control. The OVRA process does not always consider what other support exist in the classroom holistically, which can lead to multiple additional staff in classrooms and teachers may be overwhelmed with additional student-specific responsibilities. This can increase the administrative and mental load of teachers.

R-7 Professional learning and mandatory training are inadequate to equip educators to respond to OV.

ACT public school staff expressed that they do not feel adequately prepared to manage OV situations. They expressed the need for a better understanding and awareness of triggers and trauma-informed care, and an understanding of how to physically intervene to protect students. There is a strong desire for more professional learning on these subjects, including scenario-based examples.

School staff also indicated a need to be upskilled in trauma-informed care/approaches, which are usually not covered in their teaching degrees but come with experience later.

R-8 The varying level of educator capabilities does not always meet the needs of students with complex behaviours.

ACT public school staff expressed that they are unable to access professional learning due to an inability to get training on the job or take out-of-classroom time. Previously, ACT public school staff were able to contact the centralised ESO staff in the Network Student



Engagement Team (NSET) for in-classroom support in identifying complex behaviour antecedents, designing responses to complex behaviours, and enacting changes to address complex behaviours.

R-9 Technology limitations in Riskman increase the time burden on staff.

ACT public school staff described Riskman as 'clunky' and expressed frustration with the system's lack of integration with SAS. ACT public school staff described challenges related to the requirement to complete the administrative and reporting tasks straight after an incident, especially when staff may still feel physically and/or psychologically impacted by the event.

The ineffectiveness of Riskman reporting was also raised by ESO staff and ACT public school staff. ACT public school staff were concerned about the inability of Riskman to accurately describe the situation and impact of OV incidents, whilst ESO staff commented on the limitations of the system to analyse trend data and show changes over time.



4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the thematic analysis conducted through qualitative interviews with selected stakeholders has yielded valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of occupational violence in educational settings. By categorising these insights into the prevention, management, and response to OV, this research highlights the necessity for a holistic approach to addressing occupational violence. It underscores the importance of not only implementing preventive measures but also developing effective management practices and response protocols to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and students alike. Moving forward, it is imperative that these findings inform policy development, training programs, and intervention strategies, fostering a safer and more supportive educational environment for all.

To prevent Occupational Violence in ACT public schools, there was a consensus among stakeholders that the current measures are insufficient, with the focus primarily on reactive responses rather than addressing the root causes of OV. Stakeholders advocated for proactive approaches, including appropriate training and flexible funding for early intervention. Additionally, timely information sharing at transition points was highlighted as crucial for schools to prepare for students with a history of OV. Evidence of the effectiveness of using Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to manage OV was questioned and the need for mandatory standardised qualifications and training was highlighted. Mandatory trauma-informed training is seen as essential to better support students with traumatic or adverse childhood experiences. Staffing shortages are impacting workload and stress among school staff. Strengthening partnerships between parents and schools was emphasised as critical for successful interventions and support for students, though there was a noted disconnect between parental expectations and teacher roles. Finally, limited access to external support services for students and families was identified as a significant challenge hindering OV prevention effort.

Roles and responsibilities for managing OV need clarification to avoid confusion among school staff and external stakeholders. Although there is a strong reporting culture, barriers such as stigma and unfamiliarity with reporting systems still exist, leading to under-reporting among certain staff groups. While Occupational Violence Risk Assessments (OVRAs) are in place, there is a need for improvements in the process to avoid re-traumatising staff and ensure effective risk assessment and support for students. Schools face challenges in reassessing and updating existing risk ratings, leading to indefinite OVRAs for students and resource allocation concerns. Additionally, staff feel



unable to decompress after OV incidents due to staff shortages, impacting their well-being and the overall response to OV.

In responding to OV, stakeholders generally feel supported by the Directorate, though there is a disparity in views regarding the adequacy of funding to address OV challenges. Collaboration between schools and parents is deemed crucial for an effective response to OV, especially in accessing external support services for students. OVRA controls are not always evaluated for effectiveness, raising concerns about their impact on classroom dynamics. Educators face challenges in accessing training and support, particularly in cases of complex behaviours. Finally, the technology used for incident reporting is considered cumbersome and inefficient, increasing the burden on staff during incident response.



5 Appendix A Terminology Used by Interviewees

Throughout the interviews, meaningful, contextual terminology was often used by participants. The terminology below has been defined and explained in terms that are meaningful to the participants interviewed.

Additional Needs

Any educational requirement(s) for individuals arising from physical or intellectual disability, learning difficulties or behavioural difficulties.

Complex Behaviour

A challenging behaviour is one that people find hard to accept. It challenges one's ability to understand why it is happening (usually because it is breaking unwritten social rules). A complex behaviour is one which makes it difficult to initially see the reasons for the behaviour. It usually requires intervention from multiple stakeholders such as school staff, support staff, external service providers, parents, carers, and the involvement of the student themselves. Examples of challenging and complex behaviours may include:

- Physical or verbal aggression
- Disruption
- Defiance
- Absconding
- Self-injury
- Property destruction
- Dis-inhibited and impulsive behaviour
- Hyper-sexuality
- Impulsivity
- Aggressive behaviour

Throughout the interviews, the term complex behaviour included both challenging and complex behaviours.

Disability

Disability is defined as 'a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. Participants often interpreted a disability to mean 'a physical or cognitive impairment that



impacted a person's ability to interact with the world that resulted in negative consequences. Students with learning difficulties were often referred to as having a disability throughout the interviews.

Educator

Educator is a term used to refer to teachers and early childhood educators.

Learning Support Assistant (LSA)

LSAs are non-teaching staff brought in to support a classroom teacher.

Occupational Violence Risk Assessment (OVRA)

Following an incident or incidents of OV, OV case managers create an OVRA to identify controls to be enacted to support the school and classroom teacher to manage the impact of behaviours of the student(s) involved in the incident. OVRAs are linked to specific students and can be associated with recommendations for staffing and additional resources assigned to the student as control measures.

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)

PBL is a multi-tiered framework that schools use to enable students, staff, families, and the school community to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. Schools implementing PBL ensure all students are explicitly taught the expected behaviours and establish clear and consistent boundaries. Staff take a proactive and preventative approach to ensure all students receive the appropriate level of support to help them to be successful at school (Tier 1 Universal). Student incident data is evaluated so that students can receive additional support when needed (Tier 2 Selected), and a minority of students can access intensive support to enable them to engage successfully at school (Tier 3 Targeted).

Examples of Tier 1 (Universal) supports include:

- explicit teaching of behavioural expectations and social-emotional competencies
- clear boundaries in place
- high rates of acknowledgement for expected behaviours
- effective instruction
- active supervision.
-

Examples of Tier 2 (Selected) supports include:



- daily check ins
- academic modifications
- mentoring support
- social skills groups.

Examples of Tier 3 (Targeted) interventions and supports involve:

- a case management approach
- a process for assessment
- individual behaviour support planning
- ongoing monitoring and review.

Positive Behavioural Support Plan (PBSP)

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is the use of positive strategies to increase quality of life and decrease behaviours of concern by making changes to a person's environment and teaching new skills. In planning PBS strategies, considerations of any impact and implications of enacting the plan with respect to the safety of other people in the environment with reference to the Work Health and Safety Act and matters relating to duty of care. To be effective, all support strategies need to address the function of the behaviour, and the triggers and setting events that lead to the behaviour.

Riskman

A Whole of Government Incident Management Reporting Tool. All WHS incidents, including incidents of OV should be reported through Riskman.

Student Administrative System (SAS)

SAS is a Directorate-wide school-based system that records a variety of student information including negative behavioural incidents.



6 Appendix B References

Lippell, K. (2016) Addressing Occupational Violence: An Overview of conceptual and policy considerations viewed through a gender lens. Working paper 5/2016. International Labour Office – Geneva

Stevenson, D. J., Neill, J. T., Ball, K., Smith, R., & Shores, M. C. (2022). How do preschool to year 6 educators prevent and cope with occupational violence from students? *Australian Journal of Education*, 66(2), 154-170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221092472>

